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Development of the public service system in the prevention of corruption and the fight against bureaucracy: The experience of Uzbekistan

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Abstract

This article explores the issues of combating corruption in the public sector by reducing bureaucracy in administrative proceedings. Also, administrative procedures, public service delivery processes, and the relationship between the state and citizens in general are areas that can cause potential corruption. This factor is taken into account in the reforms and adopted legislation on the fight against corruption in Uzbekistan, that is, serious attention is paid to minimizing corruption risks and reducing the human factor.

Keywords: Public services, bureaucracy, world GDP, administrative proceedings, excessive paperwork, extraterritorial principle, positive impact

1. Introduction

1.1 The Impact of Bureaucracy and Corruption on Enterprise Efficiency and Public Welfare in Uzbekistan

According to the research of the World Bank, it was noted that in Uzbekistan, heads of large enterprises and small enterprises spend 31% and 26% of their time respectively, solving bureaucratic issues, entering into relations with state bodies and hokims^[1]. However, this time could be spent more effectively, for example, on increasing the volume of production, improving work efficiency and increasing the income of enterprises. In this article we provide more sufficient ways how to encourage public service system by the terms of local legislation^[2].

According to experts, the cost of complying with bureaucratic rules around the world is 17-20% of the world GDP. In particular, 17 percent of GDP in the USA, that is, 3 trillion. is a dollar. Administrative procedures, public service delivery processes, and the relationship between the state and its citizens in general are areas that can cause potential corruption.

Corruption significantly impacts both the quantity and quality of public services, profoundly affecting human development outcomes and the well-being of citizens. Research indicates that corrupt practices in service delivery contribute to increased poverty rates^[3], poorer human development indicators^[4], higher mortality rates including child mortality^[5], elevated school drop-out rates^[6], reduced trust in governments^[7], and heightened civil

¹ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/866501562572675697/pdf/Uzbekistan-Toward-a-New-Economy-Country-Economic-Update.pdf>

² O'zbekiston Respublikasining "Korrupsiyaga qarshi kurashish to'g'risida"gi Qonuni. // <https://lex.uz/docs/-3088008/> (Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Combating Corruption);

³ Chetwynd, Chetwynd, & Spector. 2003. Corruption and Poverty: A Review of Recent Literature [URL: <http://www.u4.no/recommended-r...>]

⁴ UNDP. 2004. UNDP National Human Development Reports (NHDR) and the Use of Democratic Governance Indicators. [URL: <http://www.gaportal.org/sites/...>]

⁵ Gupta, Davoodi, & Tiongson. 2001. Corruption and the Provision of Health Care and Education Services. [URL: <http://www.imf.org/external/pu...>]

⁶ Azfar and Gurgur. 2005. Does Corruption Affect Health and Education Outcomes in the Philippines? [URL: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=723702]

⁷ Rose-Ackerman. 2001. Trust, Honesty, and Corruption: Reflection on the State-Building Process [URL: http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=lepp_papers]

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unrest ^[8]. Additionally, corruption has been found to severely damage the natural environment ^[9], potentially leading to food and water insecurity, as well as mismanagement of vital resources.

This factor is taken into account in the reforms and adopted legislation on the fight against corruption in Uzbekistan, hence serious attention is paid to minimizing corruption risks and reducing the human factor.

2. Uzbekistan's Anti-Corruption and Anti-Bureaucracy Reforms

Article 22 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Combating Corruption" adopted on January 3, 2017 provides for ensuring the principles of legality and fairness, creating guarantees of the impartiality of the administrative-management process, increasing the transparency of this process, openness to external and internal control ^[10]. It also provides detailed regulation of administrative procedures while limiting discretionary powers, avoiding bureaucratic formality; introduction of simplified administrative procedures, establishment of effective mechanisms for appeals against the decisions of state bodies and compensation for damages is defined as a measure to prevent corruption in the field of administrative procedures.

The following facts and figures show what has been done to prevent bureaucracy, reduce redundant and outdated procedures, and simplify the provision of public services.

The Law "On Administrative Procedures" was adopted on administrative relations between the state and population and business¹¹. This Law established important principles applicable in administrative and legal activities, including the openness, transparency and comprehensibility of administrative procedures, the inadmissibility of bureaucratic formalities, the implementation of administrative proceedings through a "one-stop shop", and the protection of trust. For example, according to the principle of inadmissibility of bureaucratic formalism, it is prohibited for state organizations to create difficulties in their relations with citizens and businessmen through obligations, to refuse to grant them rights only for the purpose of compliance with official rules and requirements, or to restrict their rights in other ways. We can call this law an anti-bureaucracy law in essence.

3. Reforming Uzbekistan's Licensing and Permitting System to Combat Bureaucracy

The licensing and permitting system, which was considered a highly bureaucratic field, was completely reformed. As a result of the reform in this area:

1. The Law "On Licensing, Permitting and Notification Procedures" and the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on August 24, 2020 "On Measures to Fundamentally Improve Licensing and Permitting Procedures" ^[12] aimed at fundamentally

improving licensing and permitting procedures was accepted ^[13]. With this law, obsolete and fragmented existing legal documents were unified and all existing laws and by-laws in this field were canceled. In particular, 2 Laws, 2 decisions of the Oliy Majlis, 2 decisions of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and about 100 Government decisions related to this field have been declared invalid.

2. There was a 32% reduction in the number of licenses and permits. In particular, 72 licensable activities and 40 permits were canceled and transferred to an alternative method of regulation. As a result, the final lists of 49 licenses, 123 authorization documents and 37 notifications were approved by the Law.
3. A completely new simplified mechanism related to the implementation of activities by notifying the authorized body, which did not exist until now was also introduced;
4. Licensing, authorization and notification procedures are carried out through the "License" information system (license.gov.uz). Applications for obtaining licenses and authorization documents are accepted through the Internet or a special mobile application using the Unified interactive state services portal. In this case, obtaining additional documents from other authorized bodies or agreeing with them is carried out by the main authorized body independently through the "License" information system without the participation of the business entity, including by connecting to an integrated platform that allows receiving direct information that does not require a response; About 290,000 permitting documents, including electronic licenses, permits, notices, have been created through this system.

4. Advancing Public Service Delivery in Uzbekistan: Quality, Efficiency, and Accessibility

The national system of providing public services to the population has been raised to a new level in terms of quality. In the field of public services, the priority is to implement the idea that "government agencies should serve our people, not people serving our government bodies" by radically increasing their quality, speed, transparency, and accessibility. In 2018, state service centers were established in 208 districts and cities of the republic. According to the principle "documents move, not citizens", a mechanism for providing public services was introduced.

1. In 2018, the number of services provided through public service centers was 37, and today this number is 360.
2. Every day, on average, 95-100 thousand of our citizens visit public service centers and use their services. About 59 million public services have been provided by the PSCs so far. During 2023, more than 13.2 million state services were provided. The number of documents required for the provision of public services was reduced from 255 to 129 (51 percent).
3. In order to make it easier for our citizens living in rural and remote areas, mobile state services have been established. About 800,000 mobile services were provided in 2023 alone.

⁸ Corruption Watch. 2014. Corruption Fuels Poor Service Delivery. [URL: <http://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/corruption-fuels-poor-service-delivery/>]

⁹ Chetwynd, Chetwynd, & Spector. 2003. Corruption and Poverty: A Review of Recent Literature [URL: <http://www.u4.no/recommended-reading/corruption-and-poverty-a-review-of-recent-literature/>]

¹⁰ <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/3088013>

¹¹ <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/6114000>

¹² <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/5511900>

¹³ <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/4966445>

4. Since 2019, all services provided through state service centers have been provided on the basis of the "extraterritorial" principle.

What does this give the population? In this case, regardless of the place of permanent registration of public services or place of residence, our citizens and entrepreneurs will be able to use the services by contacting the public service centers in any area or in a location convenient for them.

5. Today, we are talking more about digital government than the concept of e-government. The necessary legal framework and infrastructure are being formed. The State program "Digital Uzbekistan - 2030" has been adopted.

It is important to educate citizens to use public services online and improve their skills. Therefore, in order to develop the skills of the population and business entities to use electronic government services independently and to increase their knowledge, self-service corners were established in the public sector offices.

Such conveniences, created in PSCs, contribute to the increased level of accessing public services online.

In particular, public services used by citizens online amounted to 8.4 million in 2021, 11.8 million in 2022, and more than 15 million in 2023.

6. In order to reduce bureaucracy and red tape in the process of providing public services by state agencies, the requirement of 120 types of documents and references from citizens has been canceled, more than 300 procedures have been simplified.

As a result of this, on average, more than 20 million people per year were freed from excessive paperwork, they were prevented from wandering from one office to another, and more than 300 billion soums were saved due to the fact that people could now visit just one organization.

7. "Complete" provision of services has been introduced in order to prevent residents from being overworked and wandering from office to office. This is the provision of interrelated public services in a composite form, i.e. at the same time, on the basis of a single request of a citizen.

In particular, in the process of birth registration by the registry office the following process are carried out simultaneously:

- Registration at the local medical center.
- Sending an application for a one-time allowance.
- Register the child at the address where his parents are on the permanent residents.
- The service of placing the child in a queue for the state preschool education organization.

This has reduced the need for at least 15 documents that were required previously

On average, more than 70,000 births are recorded in one month, and as a result of providing this service in a more streamlined way, we saved the populations times by avoiding visits to 4 more offices a total of 280,000 times.

8. The provision of proactive public services has been established, which provides that state organizations, on their own initiative, offer citizens the use of the necessary service in a specific situation.

For example, starting from November 2022, a system was introduced to assign benefits for children under the age of 18 with disabilities and children under the age of 18 suffering from diseases caused by the human immunodeficiency virus, as well as caregiving benefits, in a "proactive form" without requiring additional documents from citizens.

We agree with the opinion of Estonian expert Marten Kaivats, one of the specialists in this field, that the best service is one you don't even realize you've received.

9. It is well known that situational centers are one of the most effective tools for implementing a situational approach in strategic management. Every day, between 300 to 1500 people visit public service centers and civil registry offices. To monitor the quality and efficiency of the services provided and to identify problems in a timely manner, a Situational Center has been established in the Ministry of Justice.

The integrated centralized repository of the Situational Center consolidates data from various sources, displaying numbers and information on visual and interactive panels that help management understand the situation of interest. This contributes to the automation of remote monitoring, forecasting, and analysis of the services provided. Additionally, the center evaluates the efficiency of employees and ensures adherence to ethical standards.

This enables the identification of key issues and matters determining the dynamics of a situation, as well as the making of decisions that could influence its development, based on consistent and comprehensive analysis of dynamically evolving situations.

10. We can say that the fact that the Ministry of Justice of Uzbekistan, the authority responsible for providing public services, holds international ISO 27001, 37001, and 9001 certifications positively impacts the quality of its services.

5. Enhancing Citizen Satisfaction and Combating Corruption in Uzbekistan's Public Services

The Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with international organizations, continuously studies the level of citizen satisfaction with public services.

As part of a project by the European Union and the UN Development Programme, "PricewaterhouseCoopers" conducted an anonymous survey among visitors to public service centers. According to the survey results, 90% of citizens expressed satisfaction with the services provided and rated the performance of the center's employees as excellent.

It should be noted that all public service centers and platforms providing public services have information about the hotline of the Ministry of Justice's Anti-Corruption Department, as well as information encouraging the public to fight against corruption.

The aforementioned measures lead to the conclusion that the fight against bureaucracy and the development of public services in Uzbekistan are effective and demonstrate a wide-ranging positive impact in preventing corruption.

At the same time, in order to continue reforms in this area rapidly, the following proposals are suggested:

- 1) Develop a strategy to educate the population on using online services;
- 2) conduct an inventory of the current state services to

transition them to proactive and composite forms, and based on the results, develop a program to transition at least 30% of these services to such forms;

- 3) implement a comprehensive feedback system that includes the ability to evaluate provided services, including back office activities.

6. Conclusion

The Ministry of Justice of Uzbekistan, in collaboration with international organizations, is actively enhancing public service delivery and combating corruption. Surveys indicate high citizen satisfaction, with 90% of respondents rating services and staff performance as excellent. Public service centers and platforms prominently feature anti-corruption information, reinforcing the government's commitment to transparency.

These measures underscore the effectiveness of Uzbekistan's fight against bureaucracy and corruption, showcasing significant positive impacts. Efforts to streamline licensing and permitting procedures, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, and introduce digital solutions have transformed the public service landscape. The introduction of mobile state services, the adoption of the "extraterritorial" principle, and the implementation of proactive public services demonstrate the government's dedication to making public services more accessible and efficient for all citizens, regardless of their location.

To sustain and accelerate these reforms, several key proposals are suggested. First, a strategy should be developed to educate the population on using online services, ensuring that citizens are well-equipped to navigate digital platforms. Second, a comprehensive inventory of current state services should be conducted to transition more of them to proactive and composite forms, with a target of at least 30% of services undergoing this transformation. Third, implementing a robust feedback system that includes the ability to evaluate provided services, including back-office activities, will ensure continuous improvement and responsiveness to citizen needs.

By continuing to prioritize transparency, efficiency, and citizen-centric approaches, Uzbekistan can further solidify the progress made in public service delivery and corruption prevention. These ongoing reforms will not only enhance the quality of public services but also build greater trust between the government and its citizens, contributing to the overall development and well-being of the nation.

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